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The Collector and Art Critic

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What is a good counterfeit of Nature? What makes a landscape painting or marine of permanent value?

Let us to the theory.

The painting must convey to the mind the most forcible effect which can be produced from the various classes of scenery, this must be obtained by a most judicious selection of particular tints, and a skilful application of them to time and seasons. The soft and simple admixture of tones must produce pleasure without astonishment. It must create on the mind a permanent impression. The technical methods must be forgotten in the sentiments aroused. While the leading feature in the composition should be duly emphasized, the accessories should not be neglected and degraded to superfluities. It should possess harmony and simplicity.

Thus far the theory.

To take a painting by Corot and one by Winslow Homer proves how diverging the practice which applies this. Both have produced work that is perfect and abiding, and have done so by the extremes of technique.

A painting that is filled with Nature's lights and shadows, that has her truth of color, that has her open sky, that has her atmosphere, is the painting that grows upon us—as distinct from the wearying chromolike effects of a finicky brush or the scumbling attempts of one who essays to give impressions but has none.

Nature's lights and shadows are not as strongly marked as sometimes shown on canvas. Her light runs more to middle-tints, her shadows less to sombreness, if light at all is there; and both with imperceptible gradations will ever harmonize; the intensest brilliancy and the deepest gloom are all filled with ever passing and palpitating lightwaves, the darting beam and the creeping shade—glowing, flashing, scintillating or absorbing, enfolding, dying.

How few understand the true color of Nature. Do many painters study the anatomy of a rock or of a tree. Every rock in Nature is stained with countless breaking tints of vegetation; every tree, every leaf has a perpetually changing wealth of tones as light falls on it, which the most gorgeous palette can scarcely reach.

And Nature's skies! Many painters hide their skies by trees and what-not. Go out into the country, look around and up and down, and notice that two-thirds of what Nature offers is sky. The best counterfeiter of Nature must make her skies his special study. Her clouds rolling, murky, feathery, flying; they present scene after scene, picture after picture, glory after glory. Her most ponderous and lightless masses, or floating

fleeces flecked with the gold of heaven; her numberless groups of billowy fragments or evanescent film in which the sunbeams swim, form most of the picture. Holland is the artists' paradise, also because of its mighty skies.

Without atmosphere no outdoor picture can be accurate nor faithful nor even successful. Pigment untempered by atmosphere, is ink unfecundated by brains—sterile. It is said that air is invisible. Air becomes visible by what it hides. Atmosphere is visible air. In theatric effect we are familiar with the expedient of interposing invisible lace between the stage-scene and the audience, and this device serves the purpose that atmosphere does in Nature. This atmosphere or air is an entity, not only softening the distance with gray, but often adding enriching tones by sky-reflections. Thereby metallic, wooden hardness becomes vitalized—as nothing that breathes can live without air, so without air the outdoor painting is dead.

These four qualities are perfectly legitimate requirements of the perfect painting of Nature. And perfectly executed they produce the lasting painting of power.

* * *

Those who follow art, like other men, might be roughly divided into optimists and pessimists, according to their temperament, conditions, and the influence of their particular personal experience of life; but in so far as an artist is an artist, by the very nature of his calling, whether architect, painter, sculptor or other, he is necessarily brought constantly face to face with the direct social results and external aspects of the existing system of society, and he must, for good or for evil, be influenced by them.

Art is universal, knowing no clime and no country, confined in no pent-up Utica and limited by no boundaries. Her votaries are metropolitans, citizens of the civilized world, holding the freedom of all cities and honored in all lands. That is to say, such is the theory with regard to art and artists; the ideal which poets and philosophers entertain, and which may be realized—when the millennium comes. In the meantime, the prosy matter of fact is that art is developed and flourishes in any community just so far as it is locally encouraged and sustained. Artists are bread-and-butter folk like the rest of us in this work-a-day world, whatever they may be in Utopia; artists must live, and the existing system of society demands that they turn out work which shall be bought and paid for—or else they must starve, Utopia notwithstanding.

This introduces the commercial spirit in art.

There is a desire for production for profit in fields artistic, which in its operation is wasteful and debasing. Many an artist has left his high estate. From being a creative idealist in whose eyes common things are transfigured and made sublime, who sees in the rising sun, like William Blake, an innumerable heavenly host, the artist becomes a machine; and seeing many others pursuing the same course, he feels the whip of competition driving him to the struggle for existence, ever fiercer and more tragic. Thus he feels the necessity of doing work consciously with intent to sell—that is, of doing less than his best—uninspired, commercial work done to order, to supply the demands of trade. If he has cherished dreams of great and sincere works, he must put them away from him unless he can face starvation. He goes into the commercial mill. He sells his soul. He finds the practice of serving Mammon so hardens into habit as to make him forget the dreams and aspirations of his youth.

Do you know why we have so many artistic cripples? It is because they had to grind at the treadmill before their bones were set.

Another source of clogging discouragement is the cliquing, intrigue-

ing and scheming of sets and coteries; the pushing forward of incompetents for social reasons; the giving out of prizes and medals at exhibitions through wirepulling and logrolling. No wonder George Inness hated exhibition-jumbles and medal-frippery; no wonder Winslow Homer takes to the woods, or that serious men like Davies and others, who some day will take the place of these leaders, eschew cabals. How discouraging, how disheartening it is for a young artist to see that his work cannot always speak for itself, but his toadying to some dealer or patron is of greater importance. He sees himself forced to be a flatterer or a trade hack.

There is but one way of escape from this commercial spirit, so deadening to the cause of true Art.

Let young artists of sufficient promise have ample opportunities afforded them to "arrive," before being burdened with the overwhelming thought, how to keep the head above water.

Scholarships of at least three years' duration should be established at all good art institutions for promising students.

Art lovers could best demonstrate their true patronage of art by taking care of a promising young artist for a few years and enable him to work out his own salvation without the trammels of the bill collector.

* * *

Museums are educational institutions. Their conservative and refining influences on society are not enough considered. They are not merely depositories of curiosities and places to amuse an idle hour. They are schools of the beautiful; academies of the æsthetics.

But consider the object in its widest sense. First a museum must be fitly housed. No temporary looking shelter of treasures, though it be the harbinger of something better, but a substantial building, the artistic appearance of which endorses the value of its contents. However necessary to a college the liberal equipment of its faculty may be, its buildings and dormitories are hardly secondary in importance, for various reasons, to its success.

Secondly, the exhibits of a museum must run the entire gamut of art development. To wit: there is a place in a museum for undeveloped art expression, if it be art indeed. The most catholic view must be taken and the widest range must be deployed. There need not be a display of gee-gaws and scarecrows, neither the patronizing exhibit of the work of official favorites. There must be demonstrated the philosophy of art as manifested in the best attainable specimens of all epochs, arranged so as to show their æsthetic qualities and historical distinctions.

Take a special instance as to painting.

There is room in a museum for the story-telling picture. And herein I differ *in toto* from John Ruskin, as he expressed himself in 1880 in a series of letters on this subject to the Leicester Corporation, which was endeavoring to establish a museum. Saith he: — "A museum is not a theatre. Both are means of noble education—but you must not mix up the two. Dramatic interest is one thing; æsthetic charm another; a pantomime must not depend on its fine color, nor a picture on its fine pantomime. It is long since I have been so pleased in the Royal Academy as I was by Mr. Britton Rivière's 'Sympathy.' The dog in uncaricatured doggedness, divine as Anubis, or the Dog-star; the child entirely childish and lovely; the carpet might have been laid by Veronese. A most precious picture in itself, yet not one for a museum. Everybody would think only of the story in it; everybody be wondering what the little girl had done, and how soon she would be forgiven, and, if she wasn't, how soon she would stop crying and give the doggie a kiss and comfort his heart. All

which they might study at home among their own children and dogs just as well; and should not come to the museum to plague the real students there"; all which is special pleading, for a museum is *not* for students only, but to a far greater extent for what might be called the common people, who might study all these things at home—but also, in the museum, how they are expressed on canvas.

Dramatic, still less didactic, intention should not disqualify a work of art for museum purposes. The social and domestic sphere, depicted with vital force, awakens a love for the humbler walks of life, and also for the manner in which they are portrayed. Hovenden in his last picture, which was exhibited at the World's Fair, had a story to tell, and he told it with modest simplicity. His "Breaking Home-ties" appealed to the heart, and its memory has awakened cherished recollections to multitudes who were led to an appreciation of the medium whereby the tale was told full well as of the tale itself. The pictures of Hogarth came like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, striking with telling effect the calloused heart of England—yet, withal, Hogarth was a great painter, and who will deny him a place in a museum? Prof. Van Dyke, the art critic, inveighs mightily against the story-telling picture from an artistic standpoint, yet he accorded Joseph Israëls' "Alone in the World" a foremost place among the Chicago '93 pictures.

I might not recommend such pictures for a private collection, if the taste of the collector reaches for other and higher fields, but a museum should possess them to form the taste and lead the public from the lower to these higher fields of art expression.

It is easy enough to carp at whatever has been done, be it by the consensus of generations. Iconoclasm is not always directed against erroneous beliefs. Quoting from memory, I recall a criticism on the pictures of the Salon Carré of the Louvre, where it was said that in these pictures there was "no unity of tone or idea. Their finest qualities are lost in the jarring propinquity of opposite elements and the primary effect of them in mass is to bewilder. Plato in a mob is an ordinary man. Solomon in an assembly of kings loses his special magnificence; genius is invisible in a crowd. God's elect herded in a pen, labeled for show, and all talking at once."

Cleverly spoken—and disgustingly irrelevant. Thus the petals of the June rose have been criticised for not being a deep enough pink.

It is true, mistakes have been made in every museum collecting, especially at the beginning. But museum authorities are pretty generally men of intelligence and culture, and always immensely superior to their critical assailants in knowledge, taste, and general ability. And they are constantly benefiting by larger opportunities as these present themselves, and the early mistakes are gradually minimized and eradicated. It has been said that there are at least 1,500 pictures in the Louvre that have no business there—*à le bonheur*; we still may recognize the Louvre as the greatest museum in the world. And the Louvre has been built up exactly in the manner in which museums here and abroad are now developed.

* * *

What is the artistic taste of the people? Take it in music. At any public band concert classical music is but lukewarmly applauded, while a new claptrap piece, with babies crying, roosters crowing, musicians whistling, or any fandango, is rapturously received. The less music, the more enthusiasm.

There are indications, however, if one will watch closely at consecutive concerts where the same crowd is apt to congregate, that when more serious music is repeated a few times, the appreciation grows. Some of

the less weighty grand operas like the "Bohemian Girl" or "Martha," and especially the intermezzo of "Cavalleria Rusticana," are becoming known and lead anvil choruses, etc., a close second in popularity. Even parts of Tannhäuser and serious Bach Preludes are recognized and received with favor.

The same is seen in the public appreciation of pictures, for instance at the Academy. *Οἱ πολλοί* gathers with avidity around a multi-colored fortune teller with a fashion-plate visitor, or admires the smooth Noah's ark cattle of some of our Academicians. A tour-de-force by candlelight or a bootblack somersault takes the cake—for the crowd cannot fortunately hand out the palm.

But mark again, if in public criticism, or by press reproductions, attention is called to the better class of work, we see at subsequent free Sundays appreciative knots stand before these representations of higher art, and although the comments be ignorant and crude, there is an evident desire to discover why this is better than the symphony in vermillion that hangs on the line.

All this proves the dormant taste of the people, its ability to appreciate the right ideal, its susceptibility for the cultivation of taste.



ROSSETTI

DANTE'S DREAM

Courtesy of Berlin Photograph Company

As to realism in art, the following story of the three students of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Marseilles bears repeating. One of the students claimed to have painted a little piece of pine wood in imitation of marble so perfectly that when he placed it in water it sank to the bottom.

The second student outdid the first by telling that he had painted a view of the polar region so naturally that when he hung a thermometer on his easel the mercury fell to 20 below zero.

And the third, not to be left out of the running, said that his portrait of a certain nobleman was so lifelike that it had to be shaved every other day.